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ABSTRACT

Although the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) has been certifying teachers since 1993, a mere 16,035 U.S. teachers out of approximately 3,000,000 have achieved National Board certification as of November 2001. The NBPTS is at the cutting edge of standards-based teacher assessment and is a process administrators should know more about if they are to truly be instructional leaders. To address this issue, this paper provides an overview of the NBPTS and the certification process, discusses support for NBPTS, and offers recommendations on how administrators can support the efforts of their faculty as they engage in the national board certification process. Certification is currently available in 24 areas, based on 5 core propositions, including commitment to teaching students, learning, and reflecting upon one's teaching practice. Recommendations for administrator support include becoming knowledgeable about the certification process; reaching out to National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) in the school area; creating partnerships and support networks with other schools, districts, and/or universities; identifying available financial incentives for NBCTs; weaving components for the five core propositions into professional development activities; and acknowledging and embracing teacher leadership by celebrating all those who have been involved in promoting and supporting accomplished teaching and learning. (RT)

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Administrative Support for Teachers Seeking National Board Certification: What, Why and How?

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Administrative Support for Teachers Seeking National Board Certification:
What, Why and How?

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) was created in 1987 and has been certifying teachers since 1993. Yet, as of November 2001, a mere 16,035 U. S. teachers, out of approximately 3,000,000, have achieved National Board certification. Why are so few teachers seeking this prestigious certification? Over the past five years of both preparing teachers for, and mentoring teachers going through the National Board certification process, I have heard a myriad of concerns by teachers seeking certification. As an increasing number of teachers learn about National Board, some of these concerns have dissipated. One concern, however, has not: "administrators do not understand the process." As one principal exclaimed, "Help me understand! I have a general idea but I don't know what I'm supposed to do [to support candidates]."

NBPTS is at the cutting edge of standards-based teacher assessment and is a process administrators should know more about if they are to truly be instructional leaders. The purpose of this paper is threefold: first, school administrators are provided with an overview of NBPTS and the certification process; second, support for NBPTS is discussed; and finally, recommendations are offered on how administrators can support the efforts of their faculty as they engage in the National Board certification process. Recommendations are offered from three perspectives: teachers currently going through the process, their administrators, and my experiences facilitating the process over the past five years.

What is the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and Its Certification Process?

The National Board was established in 1987 at the recommendation of the Carnegie Task Force on Teaching as a Profession. The mission of the National board is to advance the quality of teaching and learning by:

- Maintaining high and rigorous standards for what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do.
- Providing a national voluntary system certifying teachers who meet those standards, and
- Advocating related education reforms to integrate National Board Certification in American education and to capitalize on the expertise of National Board Certified Teachers.

Certification is currently available in 24 areas. According to NBPTS, this includes 95% of the eligible teaching population. Additional certification areas are scheduled to be available by 2003 (for a complete listing of certification areas, please visit the NBPTS web site at http://www.nbpts/org). Standards for each certificate are based on five core propositions:

1. Teachers are committed to their students and their learning.
2. Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students.
3. Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning.
4. Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience.
5. Teachers are members of learning communities.

The National Board certification process is two-part. During one school year, each candidate completes four school-based entries. Three entries are classroom-based; two require videotapes of classroom interactions and one provides the candidate with an opportunity to collect and analyze particular types of student work. All three of the entries require a detailed written analysis of the teaching reflected in the videotape or student work. The fourth entry requires candidates to document their work with families, the larger community, and with colleagues and the larger profession outside the classroom. Emphasis is on quality of interactions and contributions rather than quantity, i.e., what is the impact of

each accomplishment on student learning? Time allotted for completing these entries varies. Most teachers report spending between 200 and 400 hours preparing their entries. Although entries are specific to the certification area, all candidates complete and submit 12-15 page commentaries for each entry and 15-20 pages of artifacts. The commentaries and artifacts include student work and instructional materials, based on videotapes, teaching artifacts, analysis of student work, and evidence of documented accomplishments in the professional community, including work with parents and the larger community. Each portfolio entry is designed to reflect activities that teachers engage in naturally during their work.

Candidates complete the second part of the certification process between May and July at one of 300 assessment centers around the country. They respond to on-screen or on-site stimulus materials in six 30-minute assessment center exercises that are designed around challenging teaching issues. Whereas portfolio entries are based on each teacher's classroom activities, assessment center activities are designed to illicit knowledge across the wider certificate area. For example, the Early Childhood Generalist (EC/Gen) certificate is available for teachers of children ages 3-8. At the assessment center, a pre-K teacher is expected to show knowledge of teaching and learning for children through 3rd grade.

Perhaps the hardest part of the process is the waiting. Because of the authentic nature of the portfolio entries, scoring is a lengthy process. Teachers who achieve National Board certification are generally not informed until mid to late November. Teachers who do not achieve certification the first time may "bank" individual entries for two subsequent, consecutive years from the date of initial score notification while they retake any combination of portfolio entries and/or assessment center activities.

Why Do Administrators Need to Know About National Board Certification?

Current research shows that National Board certified teachers (NBCTs) have a substantial impact on teaching and learning both in the classroom and in the larger school community. The 2001 study, "Accomplished Teaching: A Validation of National Board Certification," conducted by researchers at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, found that NBCTs consistently ranked higher on 13 dimensions related to the skills and abilities; two were related to student learning; and a final attribute was a combination of student outcomes and teacher characteristics. According to the researchers:

> The National Board certified teachers in this sample possess, to a considerably greater degree than non-[National Board] certified teachers, those characteristics of expert teaching that have emerged from the body of research on teaching and learning. Specifically, they possess pedagogical content knowledge that is more flexibly and innovatively employed in instruction; they are more able to improvise and to alter instruction in response to contextual features of the classroom situation; they understand at a deeper level the reasons for individual student success and failure on any given academic task; their understanding of students is such that they are more able to provide developmentally appropriate learning tasks that engage, challenge, and even intrigue students, but neither bore nor overwhelm them; they are more able to anticipate and plan for difficulties students are likely to encounter with new concepts; they can more easily improvise when things do not run smoothly; they are more able to generate accurate hypotheses about the causes of student success and failure; and they bring a distinct passion (i.e., deep commitment to their students' academic success) to their work (Executive Summary and Full Report are available at http://www.nbpts.org/nat_bd_cert_teachers/nbct_impact.html)

Further, data compiled by NBPTS shows that NBCTs are lifelong learners, i.e., more than half hold a master's degree and almost 70% belong to at least one professional association; are dedicated to classroom teaching; they are dedicated to classroom teaching, i.e., 90% report that they are currently teaching in a classroom; and they are leaders in education, i.e., 99.6% reported being involved in at least one leadership activity, including mentoring and coaching. In addition, teacher who have completed the certification process have consistently reported that going through the process provided a strong professional development experience (e.g.,

Rotberg, Futrell, & Lieberman, in their February 1998 Phi Delta Kappan article, "National Board Certification: Increasing Participation and Assessing Impacts).

Finally, NBPTS has bipartisan support from a wide range of associations including:

- The National School Boards Association;
- The National Education Association;
- The American Federation of Teachers;
- The National Governors Association and
- State and local school boards.

The commitment to accomplished teaching is evident in the increasing number of states and school districts that offer incentives to NBCTs. According to information available on the NBPTS website, "incentives for National Board Certification are provided at the local level in more than 200 school districts or through statewide programs funded by other sources. Currently, 40 states offer at least one incentive for National Board Certification and 31 of those states, offer multiple incentives that provide financial support and use National Board Certification to permit greater inter-state mobility for accomplished teachers."

How Can Administrators Support Teachers Seeking National Board Certification?

Under the assumption that increasing the quality of teaching and learning is our raison d'être, this begs the question: How can school administrators support teachers seeking National Board certification in their schools? The following is a sample of comments from a survey conducted with a cohort of 13 teachers representing six Chicago public elementary schools, who are currently going through National Board certification. Teachers were asked to respond to the following questions:

1. How much do you think your principal knows about NB certification?
2. In what ways can he/she support you through the process?

- I think my principal knows something about National Board certification, but she doesn't really discuss it. It would be nice to know that my principal was aware of the challenge I am taking on. Simply being acknowledged for this, and maybe some words of support, would be very appreciated.
- My principal knows very little about the process. She hasn't talked to me personally but has mentioned it to others at staff meetings. She seems to be impressed by it...just showing support with encouragement or inquiry would be helpful.
- We have a new principal this year. She appears bewildered by the idea of the National Board process. Her support may come in the area of permission. I will have her permission to carry on.
- My principal can support me by understanding that changes in lesson plans might come about due to preparing or finishing requirements. She will understand that other teachers may be helping with a video or arranging for students to come to my class.
- I think that two years ago my principal knew very little about the National Board process. Now she is the proud principal of six teachers in her school going through the process. My principal proudly acknowledged the National Board candidates in a weekly bulletin, wishing us luck and success. She has been supportive in ordering two new video recorders. She has supported flexibility in our schedules, the use of auxiliary staff to assist in videotaping and constant verbal support and encouragement.
- My principal is very on top of what the National Board is and what it entails. She is very supportive and excited that I have taken on the challenge. She is supportive in that she has addressed my need for supplies and equipment. She has acknowledged

me and other candidates during faculty meetings and has encouraged others to offer a hand whenever necessary.

One teacher summarized how she believes her principal views the National Board certification process:

During the past two years, principals have been made aware of the significance of the National Board and what it says about teachers and their school. For a principal, it states that their teachers are accomplished and they know that students are being taught well by qualified, knowledgeable teachers who know and understand their students and are involved in the school community. A principal also knows now that their teachers can work collaboratively and are reflective in their teaching practices and are constantly learning and trying new ways to bring the best into the classroom.

Principal's Responses

I spoke with principals from five of the six schools represented in the cohort. Principals were asked the following questions:

1. How familiar are you with the National Board certification process?
2. How can you support your teachers going through the process?
3. How might their involvement impact the larger school community?

In general, principals said they were "aware of" NBPTS. "We know it's out there." All of the principals expressed a need for better or different communication at various levels. At the district level, principals felt that it would be helpful "to have live bodies to make presentations at principals' meetings." "Principals have too many pieces of paper. It would be helpful to receive bulleted information on how administrators can support teachers." At the school building level, they expressed their reliance on the teachers to share information. They concurred that they need to hear from the teachers going through the process. Principals have

"a million things to do. It's not a question of support, but of what can I do?" This is a "shared responsibility…Teachers need to tell administrators what they need."

Even with limited knowledge on the specifics of the certification process and few requests for support from teachers, principals offered to:

- Provide class coverage and/or release time;
- Establish a professional resource center;
- Purchase video equipment and other materials; and
- Set aside regular meeting times to meet with candidates.

In one school, the principal has a designated staff member to work with National Board candidates.

Three of the principals commented that they already see positive changes in teachers going through the process and expect that it will permeate the school. "One veteran teacher has had a 'rebirth' of sorts. She used to close her door and work in isolation. Now she is more collaborative and is embracing collegiality." Another teacher has gone from textbooks and lecture to utilizing a variety of teaching strategies and instructional tools as she increases her understanding of different learning styles."

All principals anticipate involving these teachers in designing and implementing professional development activities. One principal noted that school administration is in the process of a paradigm shift from one of "monitoring" to one of "instructional leader." "Principals need to be assertive in developing a learning community for all – NBCTs and those familiar with the process can serve as valuable players in ongoing professional development."

Over the past seven years I've worked with National Board candidates in Northern Virginia, DC, and in Chicago. During this time, information about and participation in National Board certification is increasing. In addition to the suggestions reported above, principals can support teachers in the following ways:

Become knowledgeable about the process – what are the requirements, timelines, and resources needed by candidates? Determine what outside resources may be available such as buying, borrowing or requesting donations of video equipment, a videographer, and laptops.

Reach out to NBCTs in your area - invite a NBCT to present at your school or to serve as a mentor to candidates in your school or district. A list of NBCTs is available by state on the NBPTS website.

Create partnership and support networks with other schools, districts, and/or universities. Information on existing support programs is also on the website.

Identify available financial incentives for NBCTs – Incentives range from a yearly bonus each year for the 10-year life of the certificate to a one-time bonus upon achieving certification. Some districts offer candidates one to three days of release time to complete their written commentaries. See the NBPTS website for a list of available incentives in your district and/or state.

Weave components of the five core propositions into professional development activities. Even if teachers do not go through the process, they may benefit from engaging in activities that mirror those required, e.g., videotaping lessons, peer coaching, reflecting on teaching, analysis of student work, etc.

Finally, acknowledge and embrace teacher leadership by celebrating all those who have been involved in promoting and supporting accomplished teaching and learning.

As the paradigm in educational administration shifts from "educational management" to "educational leadership," more emphasis is being placed on the principal's role of instructional leader. An understanding of the NBPTS standards and certification process and how to encourage and support teachers going through the process is one valuable resource for school leaders to embrace.

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